have a Common enquiry/Help Desk at the international terminal at Hyderabad airport.

(d) No, Sir.

(e) Does not arise.

Access to gas and oil of Central Asian countries

*237.PROF. P.J. KURIAN: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have made any plans to seek access through Afghanistan for gas and oil pipelines from Central Asian countries to India;

(b) if so, the details of such proposals;

(c) what are the problems in getting such pipelines and access; and

(d) the details of steps taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI MURALI DEORA): (a) to (d) As the domestic availability of gas is not adequate to meet the country's demand, we have been pursuing import of gas, both as Liquefied Natural gas (LNG) and through transnational pipelines. Recently, an Indian delegation led by the Minister of State for Petroleum & Natural Gas, participated in the 9th Steering Committee meeting of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TAP) gas pipeline project held in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, on 14-15 February, 2006, as an Observer. The Steering Committee has invited India to become an official member of the project. The invitation is under consideration.

At the Steering Committee meeting, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), who are the lead development managers and the consultants for the project, presented a draft report on the "Security Study of the Pipeline". The Security Study concluded that TAP Project is feasible from a security perspective, but would require a firm commitment of resources, innovative physical security measures, a dynamic social outreach programme, and professional management. The Afghan delegation confirmed that security in the country has improved; again, additional infrastructure is being developed which will enhance the security of the pipeline system. ADB also made a brief presentation about the options relating to project structure and investment scenarios pertaining to the project.

Other issues pertaining to the project relate to: Turkmenistan's gas reserves and the commitment of specific reserves for the project; the routing

of the pipeline; technical specifications pertaining to the pipeline; and pricing of the gas. These and other issues will continue to be examined by the Steering Committee of the project.

The proposal under consideration pertains to supply of natural gas to India by pipeline from Turkmenistan *via* Afghanistan and Pakistan. There is no proposal before the Government to seek access through Afghanistan for an oil pipeline from Central Asian countries to India.

Increase in short term interest rate by RBI

*238. SHRI R. SHUNMUGASUNDARAM: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Reserve Bank of India has raised the short term interest rate the repo rate and the reverse repo rate recently;

(b) if so, what prompted the increase; and

(c) what is the consequence or the effect of the above increase?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM): (a) Yes, Sir. With effect form 24th January, 2006, the Reserve Bank of India has increased the fixed reverse repo rate from 5.25% to 5.50% and fixed repo rate from 6.25% to 6.50%.

(b) For moderating inflationary expectations and for maintaining orderly financial markets while ensuring the continuation of the positive investment climate, RBI, as a part of its overall monetary policy initiatives, has revised the fixed repo and reverse repo rates.

(c) Proactive policy responses taken by RBI have headed off potential excess demand pressures and contributed to an improvement in macro-economic performance. As per the latest information, the inflation rate based on the whole sale price index stood at 4.34% on February 18, 2006 as compared with 4.89% a year before.

Higher Allocation for Tourism Industry

*239. SHRI RAVULA CHANDRA SEKAR REDDY: Will the Minister of TOURISM AND CULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have granted higher allocations to keep the tourism industry on the priority of State Governments;

(b) if so, the details of such allocations made to Andhra Pradesh during the current year;